Links & Letters 4, 1997 39-51

Re-'Placing' the Postcolonial Nation: Narration, Nationalism and Satire in Gabriel García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*

Stephanie Newell
University of Stirling

July 1996

Abstract

The tensions and silences within influential «postcolonial» theories, the majority of which are written and published from locations in the First World, can be explored by opening them to a critical dialogue with works of so-called «postcolonial» literature. In many respects, these narratives, which are international in readership yet written in Third World locations, challenge the concept of «postcoloniality» itself; the works of writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Bessie Head and Gabriel García Márquez manifest a lococentrism, an investment in a national place which runs counter to the emphasis on migration, displacement and exile prevailing in current «postcolonial» theory. Focusing upon Gabriel García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), the article explores the ways that the novel might be used to critique and displace some of the key theoretical presuppositions that pervade the most popular of postcolonial theories. I will be suggesting that, through the use of satire, Márquez is positively reinstating and «placing» what will emerge against the postcolonial theorists as an open-ended and dynamic nationalism.

Key words: Márquez, Postcolony, Nation, Dictatorship, Satire.

Table of Contents

1. The Limits of «Postcolonial» Theory

Homi Bhabha (1994) and Edward Said (1993) have recently expressed similarly ardent anti-nationalist sentiments. Different in so many other respects, their theoretical positioning on the issue of nationalism seems to be influenced by a rejection of collective political or ethical agendas, which are believed to presuppose a unitary subjectivity that is no longer sustainable;

a second influence, certainly for Said, is the rise of neo-fascist, reactionary ideologies throughout Europe, manifesting what he terms «a new and ... appalling tribalism» sweeping across the continent, «fracturing societies, separating peoples, promoting greed» (1993: 21). Both cultural critics refuse this ideological terrain: nationalism is, they suggest, a battlefield upon which antagonists armed with manichean absolutes and homogeneous identities undertake a violent struggle for self-hood. They argue instead in favour of the re-location of theory and theorists to the margins, the atopias *between* the boundary fences of national territories and ideologies. From these border-crossings and thresholds, multiple discursive practices compete and overlap inter-nationally (Said 1993: 20; Bhabha 1994: 1-18; see Bhabha 1990: 291-322). Situated in this privileged, re-visionary position between national territories, the cultural critic becomes a dis-placed no-one. Always passing to and fro in a state of perpetual migration, the critic never arrives in a stable place. This migratory condition is considered to be an exemplary existential mode for the multiply-constructed, «postcolonial» subject.

The progressive individual lives out-of-bounds, away from the moral binaries attaching to nationalisms. She or he occupies, without resting in, what Bhabha terms the «in-between» zone, disconnected from nationalist discourses; it is this «third space» which makes inter-cultural hybridity and transformation possible (Bhabha 1994: 1). Edward Said likewise foregoes the binary interpretive structures that prevailed in *Orientalism* (1978); he too describes a new globe-trotting individual, slightly more «placed» than Bhabha's version of the postcolonial subject, but similarly composed of a «*contrapuntal* ensemble» of interdependent perspectives, identities and political positions (Said 1993: 60). Ideally this «subject» should be — like Said — a «nomad» between histories, cultures, nations and narrations (Said 1993: xxix).

These theorists of the postcolonial experience actively privilege suppressed histories, attempting to clear pathways in cultural theory for the voices of marginalised peoples. By giving access to dissenting and different histories, they seek to transform the dominant white standpoint by injecting into it a multiplicity of other perspectives. The exile's or immigrant's experience of being divorced from a community and homeland is now being re-described as the prototypical *freedom*; in Bhabha's view, displacement forms the critical channel through which «newness» itself enters the world (Bhabha 1994: 212-235).

By romanticising displacement, however, and by adopting anti-nationalist positions, Said and Bhabha run the risk of taking away the voices of the individuals they seek to empower. In the process of dismissing nationalist group affiliations as being xenophobic and dangerously dichotomised, the critics run the risk of succumbing to the totalising impulse of the very structures they reject. For nationalism is constituted by them as a bounded, monolithic discourse: the «ambivalence» or «third space» between nations, which they are occupying to make their critique, is thus refused to the discourse of nationalism itself.

Bhabha and Said focus almost exclusively on the polarities characterising nationalism. If one follows Tom Nairn's (1977) description of nationalism as having a «Janus-face», then such polarities can be seen to coexist in an ambivalent partnership with nationalism's other face, which is expansive, cosmopolitan and potentially dialogical. When locating such an ambivalence in nationalism, one can borrow, and playfully re-root, Bhabha's own important discussion of ambivalence in colonial discourse (1994: 66-84). By translating it across geographical, historical and discursive borders into the Latin American neo-colony described by Márquez in *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* Bhabha's notion can be utilised to re-locate and open up a fluid, heteroglossic space within the nationalism he currently rejects. In this way, the «post-colonial» novel from Latin America, in which a collective sense of the nation emerges, can be employed to dialogise and answer back to popular post-colonial theories conceived in North America.

In his essay, «The Other Question», Bhabha suggests that «ambivalence» is the critical term creating the space for slippage and freedom in an otherwise unequivocal, binary opposition between the colonial oppressor and colonised subject; he argues that colonial constructions of «native» otherness are internally splintered by the coupling of recognition and disavowal (1994: 67-68). Bhabha locates ambivalence in the way that the colonial discourse rejects as absolutely Other the very subjects that simultaneously must be incorporated into the colonial self-image to validate it. His key idea is that the project of colonial discourse to produce «the colonized as a [fixed] social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible» can only fail (1994: 70-71). Absolute power always risks being suffocated or subverted by the multiple identities attaching to the colonized individual. This is acknowledged in Márquez's novel, where even the dictator recognises ambivalence —albeit fleetingly— in his rebellion against Saenz de la Barra's absolute certainties. «What a barbarian», the dictator comments about his brutal officer, «[h]e never had an instant of doubt, he never left a chink for an alternative» (García Márquez 1975: 162). Unless all «others» are to be totally obliterated, this vital chink of doubt must exist, even in the most single-voiced of nationalisms.

2. Fragmenting the Latin American Dicatorship

The Autumn of the Patriarch can be re-read in a way that comments on and critiques Bhabha's notion of the «in-between», that is, the space which contains postcolonial subjectivities and expresses the modern migrant's multiplicity. It is a polysemantic, complex novel whose openness and seamlessness reject, on a structural level, the definitive meanings imposed on the population by its main character, known only as 'the General'. The novel seems to be structured according to an aesthetic of doubt which opens up a space for the insertion of alternative interpretations and histories. The novel is set in an unnamed Latin American country, and is composed of long sentences, recounted by multitudes of unfixed, frequently unnamed subjects. The text

commences with the self-portrait of this population, who are fractured, disoriented individuals. Nevertheless they narrate as a common we-subject, redeeming the collectivity, for they have gathered together as a fearful group to make narrative sense of and re-historicise their country's past. In this way, interpretive absolutes are ruptured and dis-placed: and the form of the text precisely images its critical, political content.

The dissenting, doubt-full structure and subject-matter of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* work against the homogenous identity of loyal «patriot» constructed and imposed by the dictatorship. The very act of voicing their first-person testimonies in the neo-colony is disruptive, affirming multiple subject-positions that threaten the godly «I» of the General. These people constantly escape the dictator's imposition of «truths». This occurs in spite of the state's refusal to accept any spontaneity on the part of the people. For example, after the rebellion against his regime, the General chooses a young soldier

> and had him skinned alive in the presence of all and they saw his flesh tender and yellow like a newborn placenta and they felt the soaking of the warm blood broth of the body ... and then they confessed what he wanted. (García Márquez 1975: 30)

The people's diffuse and conflicting testimonies undermine this absolutism. Instead, their suppositions and rumours are «where historicity is produced in opposition to a history seized by power» (Ortega 1988: 180), moulding a shared consciousness and debate from the semantic void.

One of the main motivations for this article is to use Márquez's novel to question Said's and Bhabha's substitution of multiplicity and migration for national identites and locations. Rather than the dissolution of boundaries being a liberating, creative impulse as Bhabha proposes, in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* it reveals a population that has been, at an expressive and hermeneutic level, radically disenfranchised and pacified by the complete fragmentation of their agreed «structures of feeling» (R. Williams). The people have been exiled from language and meaning, forced to be no-where and no-one by the dictator's supreme «I». The novel demonstrates the necessity to claw back subjectivity through a collectively constituted national identity, a re-imagination of the community. The General has rendered language monological by refusing the rupture between signifiers and the signified world, insisting instead on fraudulent «realities» such as his weekly win on the national lottery. The narrating group, who speak as the oppressed population, is only liberated back into the interpretive process when it finally accepts that the patriarch's degenerated corpse is more «real» than the mythologies attached to their leader:

> it was hard to admit that that aged person beyond repair was all that remained of a man whose power had been so great that once he asked what time is it and they had answered him whatever you command general sir. (García Márquez 1975: 71)

The population has had no control over the creation of its own social and temporal reality, which has been generated for them, for generations, by the dictator.

Hayden White writes, in *The Content of the Form* (1987) that by accepting and utilising a unilinear narrative structure, a historian presupposes the collective morality of a social system: this «serves as a fixed reference point by which the flow of ephemeral events can be endowed with a specifically moral meaning» (White 1987: 22). A society describes its national identity in story-like, holistic terms. The state of the nation in Márquez's work is reflected in the way his narrators attempt to weave an interpretive thread through the otherwise disconnected and fragmented first-person testimonies. The multitude of oral accounts is spun around their repeated reference to the dictator's unburied corpse, which acts as the structural pivot for their «labour of remembrance» (Jameson 1986). In this way, the process of historical narration allows the emergence of a dynamic «nation», which surpasses the dictatorship's monological constructions of reality.[1]

These unofficial, other national histories are orally performed in the text through the accumulation of layers of diverse testimonies, rumours and speculations, through parabolic, oral storytelling voices which repeat, «So it came to pass» (1975: 13). Textual details accumulate as the first-person witnesses emerge from the narrating we-subject, before fusing again with the people, interpreting their shared history and, implicitly, agreeing on a narrative by which to define themselves. While the narrating we-subject undertakes a historical and nationalist intervention, however, this is not enacted through the unfolding of events in chronological time (see White 1987; Anderson 1993). Instead, the multiple narrators are juxtaposed: in this way, «real» historical time for the Latin American neo-colony under a dictatorship is presented as being fragmented (while the dictator's personalised time-scale is epic, determined and sealed). This fracturing of narrative unilinearity echoes the dysfunctional relationship between the state and the population. The dictatorship is presented as lacking in temporal coherence, giving rise to a permanent sense of uncertainty and political crisis on the part of the population. The narrative thus acts out the country's «crisis of uncertainty» (1975: 20).

3. Imposed and Emergent National Identities

The people find the dictator's body lying face down in «his denim uniform without insignia, boots, the gold spur on his left heel, older than all old men» (García Márquez 1975: 7), placed in the prophesied position. Without warning, the we-subject shifts in the fifth section, away from the people to «we commanders of the general staff responsible for public order and state security». This ambiguous and malign new narrating group offers dubious «evi-

1. A similar dynamic and polyphonic process can be traced in the work of Bessie Head.

dence» against two brothers who are executed for murdering the General's wife, Leticia, and their child (1975: 157). These official myth-makers are shown recreating the General's corpse, placing it in the position prophesied during his reign, powdering its face, stuffing the body, making up its face with lipstick and rouge: the process of invention fails, however, for «not even the glass eyes stuck into the empty sockets could give him the stamp of authority he needed if we were to put him on display for the masses» (1975: 129). The group of politicians, returned exiles and military strategists is separate from the narrators opening the previous sections: they remythologise the dictator, repress the «true» circumstances of his death, inherit the reins of power and re-distribute the national assets —called «the booty of his power»— amongst themselves (1975: 129).

The impact of the General's paranoid imposition of truths is reflected in the populations' specular and inconsistent interpretive economy: «we saw ... we saw ... We thought it possible», they repeat (1975: 6). In spite of continuing to have «reality» arranged for them, the people search the ruined and disintegrating palace for visible signs of the dictator's existential reality, for evidence of his personality and his history existing behind the chaos and decay caused by the hens, cows and birds which roam the rooms. Their hypotheses are initially hesitant and fearful as «all sorts of conjectures were made» (1975: 7). At first, they find only visible evidence of mythical «truths»; for example, a suit with bullet holes confirms their belief «that a bullet shot into his back would go right through without harming him» (1975: 38). Rather than a creative liberation into historicity and interpretation, in this novel, the heterogeneous «in-between» in which opposites are conflated, reflects the complete breakdown of society and interpretation. Bhabha's «in-between» is not only a free-playing zone between nations, but an ambivalent space, simultaneously containing the possibilites of oppression and creativity.

The people express a kinetic, doubt-full conception of history and the nation. This coexists in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* with the General's authoritarian commandments, for «a nation is the best thing that was ever invented, mother, he would sigh» (1975: 17). It can be suggested, against Bhabha and Said, that *both* positions signify «nationalist» narrations: one nationalism is hegemonic, dictated to the polity by the General. His nationalist discourse operates within an epic, mythical interpretive mode filled with absolute meanings, with cosmic, religious and heroic symbols (see Bakhtin 1981: 13). The dictator's political model is monological, with the time-scale and structure of epic narratives which Bakhtin suggests are «walled off absolutely from all subsequent times ... There is no place in the epic world for any open-endedness, indecision, indeterminacy» (Bakhtin 1981: 15-16). The other nationalism, working within and against the power structure, is heteroglossic, ambiguous, multiple and yet voiced by a single social group (see Mbembe 1992).

Márquez's collective narrator gains its identity from being the regime's Other: it thus retains a basic manichean element, constituted as a group in

opposition to the oppressive state. Such binary divisions occur as vital moral and political markers in *The Autumn*, as Márquez accommodates the General's absolutist, conflictual nationalism within an alternative, dialogical frame facilitated by the idea of doubt. In their very hesitancy, the people thus dialogise the closed structures of the regime, inserting indeterminate interpretations that deconstruct it. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* seems to suggest that, in liberating the neo-colony from oppression, one *must* have essentialist, collectively narrated myths that can be used to reclaim and re-bound the national territory. Such myths, inserted into what Benedict Anderson calls the nation's «homogeneous empty time», help to define and differentiate the collectively «imagined community» (Anderson 1993: 24).

While distinct, these two paradigms of the nation and its narration cannot be dichotomised and are mutually reliant. Like the coloniser in Bhabha's theory of ambivalence, the dictator requires the people to conform to his myths and fantasised realities (while disavowing and eliminating their sameness). The people themselves are complicit with the dictatorship. They conform to its power structures, for «the absence of information opens a cultural void, a loss of identity, in which the myth of the origin of power emerges» (Ortega 1987: 177). The we-subject reifies and remythologises the General's power —even while they introduce historicity to the nation.

As we have seen, the «third space», or «in-between», is promoted by Bhabha as the site where postcolonial subjects can play with or subvert hegemonic discourses. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, it is also the locus for the population's re-mystification of the oppressive regime. The ambivalence of Bhabha's «in-between» is therefore revealed by a central thematic aspect of *The Autumn*, where myths *hinder* the emergence of doubt and block the people's pathway to freedom. The population has become reliant on the General:

> for the only thing that gave us security on earth was the certainty that he was there, invulnerable to plague and hurricane ... invulnerable to time, dedicated to the messianic happiness of thinking for us. (García Márquez 81-82)

His seeming immortality «infused us with a security and a restful feeling» (1975: 100). They have grown to depend upon him to such an extent that they ask, like lost children, «what would become of our lives after him»? (1975: 169).

The narrating we-subject is volatile, always on the fringe of mass hysteria: they submit to the cult of Bendicion, the dictator's mother, and to the state-propagated «illusions» about her resurrection and miracles.[2] In times of political crisis when spontaneity is most repressed, one expression of popular

2. The dictator, too, is sucked into the web of official illusions, becoming as much a «victim» as the people, «alone with himself ... feeling around among the wisps of illusory mist on the barren plains of power» (García Márquez 1975: 185).

political identities might be the belief in apocalyptic and cosmic signs: on the day of the General's death, the people think that:

> it would rain blood, that hens would lay pentagonal eggs, and that silence and darkness would cover the universe once more because he was the end of creation. It was impossible not to believe all of this. (García Márquez 1975: 99)

The dissolution of shared social narratives in the authoritarian state creates these hysterical undertones: monological narratives fill the chink of doubt, jostling with the more creative and cosmopolitan dialogues. This is manifested most clearly when the regime declares Bendicion Alvarado a saint. Excessive rumours freely circulate amongst «the misery-laden crowd that had invaded the city with the corpse of his mother [a crowd which] was more turbulent and frantic than any» (1975: 109). This oppressed public becomes excited «over the fact that the north star moved along in the same direction as the funeral cortege» (1975: 110). In all of these scenes, Bhabha's privileged third space is shown to be destructive, totally placed within and bounded by the regime's epistemological structures.

4. Reclaiming Nationalism

The collective narrator is attempting to recover truths from the multiplicity of individual perspectives that have slipped outside the discourse of power. Time and history are «stagnant» and closed (1975: 5) at the opening. By the end of the text, people embrace an ephemeral flow of time and life, outside mythological interpretations, inside history and the process of social self-creation: «With the death of the patriarch, the time of eternity, the time of myth and legend, is over. Now all is possible once again» (Minta 1987: 121). They close the text with a positive affirmation of the human conditions of doubt and ambiguity, and simultaneously embrace the socially agreed distinction between truth and falsehood with an insistence on the fictionality of the General: he is called «a comic tyrant who never knew where the reverse side was» (1975: 206). The people seem to resolve a paradox that has destabilised both text and nation, that of voicing a collective and socially unified position from multiple subject positions. They affirm that a collective and social «we» has lived a «real» life in spite of oppression in:

> this life which we loved with an insatiable passion ... [It was] arduous and ephemeral but there wasn't any other, general, because we knew who we were while he was left never knowing it forever. (García Márquez 1975: 206)

The end of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* evidences a creative and collective transformation, towards a dialogical new nation. Until this nationalist moment, the supposed «postcolony» has remained neo-colonial. The lib-

eration is not total or unambiguous, however: firstly, there is a sinister sense of recurrence in their carnivalesque celebrations of the death. The scene precisely repeats the dictator's «first death» where he watches Patricio Aragones's corpse being «quartered and devoured by dogs and vultures amidst the delirious howls and the roar of fireworks» (1975: 26); secondly, and arising from this, the dictator's body is not buried and therefore could «rise again», as previously; and finally, the mood of hysteria recurs in «the frantic crowds who took to the streets singing hymns of joy at the jubilant news of his death» (1975: 206). This hysteria permeated the population after the «first» death: they dragged the body through the city while the palace was ransacked; and now the General's memory is again subjected to exactly what he had done to his own predecessors, «annihilating that world so that in the memory of future generations not the slightest memory of the cursed line of men of arms would remain» (1975: 26). The people act out a symbolic and recurrent transformation of time, revealing themselves to be immersed within what Achille Mbembe (1992) terms the hermeneutics of official power—its economy of spectacle, apocalypse and excess—perpetuating it by attempting to obliterate history totally, to gain control of time and create a new national order by burning the official portraits «that had been in all places and at all times ever since the beginning of his regime» (García Márquez 1975: 26).

Through satire, Márquez retains the vital «reverse side» of a binarised political discourse: and doubt is employed to map out the space in which truth and fiction are distinguished. Ideas of political order and organisation are satirically inverted when applied to the dictatorship; the total chaos resulting from the patriarch's attempt to universalise and realise a personalised reality is exposed. Thus the presidential palace is, in the springtime of his power, an inverted royal court (which should be a strictly hierarchised, closed world). All boundaries are open in this scene where «no one knew who was who or by whom in that palace with open doors in the grand disorder of which it was impossible to locate the government» (1975: 9). By the end of the text, the palace's culture has totally fused with nature as the bureaucrats have relocated and cows wander freely through the rooms, nibbling at the furnishings. Inside this carnivalesque world, courtly conventions are comically inverted. Patricio Aragone's dying speech is a burlesque of the patriotic speech of a loyal subject: «let it be said without the least respect general», he begins, cursing and condemning the patriarch for hammering his feet flat, for forcing him to drink turpentine to induce amnesia and for piercing his testicle while re-inventing him as a double and decoy (1975: 22). Patricio tells the patriarch the «truth», revealing his atrocities to readers for the first time. He establishes the foundations for «reality» in his catalogue of the facts of the regime's brutalities, including «the people you skin alive and send their hides to their families as a lesson» (1975: 23).

By maintaining the distinctiveness of truth, falsehood and ethical values, Márquez shows a sense of proportion to be entirely absent from the neo-col-

ony: dominoes are more important than the perpetual economic crises; winning the national lottery leads to the murder of two thousand children; conforming to Leticia's standards for dinner-time etiquette becomes more important than the «black vomit» sweeping the country (1975: 134). This bipolarity of «truth» and «fiction» is a political necessity to oppositional movements in neo-colonies generally; as Jonathan Boutle (1993) suggests, satire is the genre of inverted dualities, a subversive, «black market» form in postcolonial literatures, fracturing authoritarian narratives from within by politicising laughter. Northrop Frye labels satire «militant irony» in which the «moral norms are relatively clear» and which assume «standards against which the grotesque and the absurd are measured» (1957: 223). The disrespectful laughter generated by satire lays bare the gulf between «truths» and official fictions, re-opening the indeterminate space that the regime's narcissism and paranoia fills in with myths.

In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the reader's and the we-subject's laughter open a new national space that is interactive, dissolving the official law and re-centring a critical consciousness. The primary textual instance of the people's satirical power occurs during the patriarch's affair with Manuela Sanchez, when the population intervenes in cultural production to launch:

> an anonymous song which the whole country knew except him, even the parrots sang it in the courtyards ... see how he goes he can't handle his power ... wild parrots learned it from having heard it sung by tame parrots. (García Márquez 1975: 62)

It is:

> an endless song to which everybody even the parrots added verses to mock the security services of the state who tried to capture it, military patrols in full battledress broke down courtyard doors and shot down the subversive parrots on their perches ... a state of siege was declared ... so that no one would discover that everybody knew that he was the one who slipped like a fugitive of dusk through the doors of the presidential palace. (1975: 62)

The text appears to pun itself, here, mimicking and gently mocking its own free play of voices, its slippery structure and its networks of rumours. By punning the master-text's structure and style, the parrot song episode is a parodic textual echo of the whole; and *The Autumn*, like the song, lays bare the gap for subversion, satire, for voices of dissent and the writer's political critique.

In his use of satirical strategies, Márquez appears to be confronting the problem of how to represent and criticise tyranny, which propagates and consolidates its power using the same spectacular excesses that would otherwise be used against it. In order to write a critique, Márquez therefore has to exaggerate what is already excessive so that it becomes grotesque and orgiastic. It has been argued that ultimately he turns to popular scatological and carnival-

esque forms in his attempt to deflate the leader's sanctified and mythologised body.[3]

The we-subject satirises the «general of the Universe» (1975: 25) using vivid and excessive descriptions. However, only the General's fourteen-year-old schoolgirl lover uses unmediated «popular-festive» celebratory images of the body as described by Mikhail Bakhtin (whereby human bodies merge with the plenitude of nature) (Bakhtin 1968). With tenderness she evokes the carnival of their love:

> he used bread to soak up my first adolescent sauce ... he put asparagus stalks into me to eat them marinated with the brine of my inner humours ... he dreamed about eating my kidneys boiled in their own ammonia stew. (García Márquez 1975: 169)

This parodies the eucharist ritual and comically affirms the dictator's status as «corrector of god» (1975: 10). On all other occasions, the dictator's body is inflated and caricatured through the use of spectacularly exterior and excessive physical images: readers witness the dictator's ritualistic, cannibalistic consumption of General Aguilar (1975: 98); we visualise his toad-like, herniated testicle which whistles sea-shanties (1975: 126). An excess of smells also attaches to the dictator as popular myth merges him with the dung and urine of animals. In this way, the book might be seen to have «oralised» official history and carnivalised the regime. The people are using festive images against the individual to radically de-divinise his body to extremes of bestial and sexual degradation, so that, instead of an orgasm with Leticia, the «uncouth animal» defecates all over her white sheets (1975: 128).

Unlike poststructuralist theories of play and parody, Márquez's parodic treatment of the dictatorship here presupposes a political basis in an agreed «reality» where clear boundaries separate truth from fiction and facilitate laughter. These deflations are ambiguous, however. They are not simply satirical inversions or deconstructions, because, within the descriptions, the General retains his potency as a mythical, titanic figure. This ambivalence exposes the novel's central problematic—the exploration of how to eliminate such a potent myth from a potentially complicit population. The novel is composed «of hyperbolic extremes» (Zamora 1989: 47) and such a technique always risks remythologising the very material it seeks to deconstruct and critique. Márquez's grotesque realist style of writing is itself excessive like the neo-colonial regime it depicts; it therefore potentially perpetuates the same lack of proportion (see Mbembe 1992).

Comic physical excess co-exists in the text with the excessive physical violence of its non-festive elements: here the dictator's intentions are sinister and

3. See Julio Ortega's article, «*The Autumn of the Patriarch*: text and culture». McMurray, G.R. (ed.) (1987). *Critical essays on Gabriel García Márquez*. Massachusetts: G.K. Hall and Co. Ortega makes wide use of Bakhtin's discussion of Rabelais and the popular carnival.

hidden as he initiates horrific murders with the calm phrase, «Aha». In the public sphere, the dictator's presence is metonymic —people glimpse a hand, glove, eye, lips, spur— he is never seen whole (Zamora 1989: 47). This adds to his status as a legendary, omnipresent figure among his subjects, who fill in the chinks of doubt with mythological explanations.

5. *The Autumn of the Patriarch*: a Challenge to «Postcolonial» Theory

The Autumn of the Patriarch is not anti- or post-nationalist in the sense that Edward Said's and Homi Bhabha's most recent theories appear to be. In Márquez's novel, boundaries are defined, territories are «placed» and the people actively narrate the structures of a new reality. In form, the novel does, however, play out the «new internationalist» ideals of Said and Bhabha (Said 1993: 262). The text itself can be viewed as occupying an ambivalent «in-between» space: for it splinters absolutist agendas and dissolves strict binary divisions into its aesthetic of doubt. Márquez's novel becomes the site for the emergence of a participatory, creative narration of new, more dynamic myths of history and the nation.

The Autumn of the Patriarch utilises the meaningless and endless interplay of signifiers celebrated in poststructuralist theory to politicise doubt, ambivalence and play. Márquez simultaneously inserts satire into the «in-between». Through its «turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated» (Bhabha 1990: 4), Márquez's text manages to re-nationalise, to re-«place» this site without losing an investment in ideas of cultural dialogue and fluidity. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* retains an active political investment in the idea of the nation. It formulates and affirms a pluralistic and ephemeral conception of the national territory that is realised through a collective we-subject's rejection of the falsehoods propagated by the dictatorship. The populations' national consciousness is, as Frantz Fanon asserts, «accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values [because] ... it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows» (Fanon 1990: 199). Such internationalism need not be the privilege of exiled and academic inter-cultural arbiters.

> An idea from Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* can be reclaimed and applied to Márquez's newly-described nation: Postcolonial and black critiques propose forms of contestatory subjectivities that are empowered in the act of erasing the politics of binary opposition (Bhabha 1994: 179).

Such critiques are interruptive, occupying «the ambivalent margin of the nation-space». However, it is not so much the margin, in Márquez's neo-colony, as the national territory itself that is dialogised, re-placed as «the crossroads to a new transnational culture» (Bhabha 1990: 4).

References

ANDERSON, B. (1993). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* London and New York: Verso.

BAKHTIN, M. (1968). *Rabelais and his world.* (trans. H. Iswolksy) Massachusetts and London: The M.I.T. Press.

— (1981). *The dialogic imagination: four essays.* (ed./trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson) USA: University of Texas Press.

BHABHA, H.K. (ed.) (1990). *Nation and narration.* London and New York: Routledge.

— (1994). *The location of culture.* London and New York: Routledge.

BOUTLE, Jonathan (1993). «Satire in francophone African literatures». Unpublished Paper presented to the African Literatures MA class (February). London: SOAS.

FANON, F. (1990). *The wretched of the earth.* London: Penguin.

FRYE, N. (1957). *The anatomy of criticism.* London.

GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, G. (1975). *The autumn of the patriarch.* London: Picador.

JAMESON, F. (1981). *The political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act.* London and New York: Routledge.

MBEMBE, Achille (1992). «Provisional Notes on the Postcolony». *Africa.* Vol. 62, No. 1: 3-37.

MINTA, S. (1987). *Gabriel García Márquez: writer of Colombia.* London: Jonathan Cape.

NAIRN, T. (1977). *The break-up of Britain: crisis and neo-nationalism.* London: New Left Books.

ORTEGA, Julio (1987). «*The Autumn of the Patriarch: text and culture*». McMurray, G.R. (ed.). *Critical essays on Gabriel García Márquez.* 168-185. Massachusetts, USA: G.K. Hall & Co.

— (ed.) (1988). *Gabriel García Márquez and the powers of fiction.* Texas: University of Texas Press.

SAID, E.W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism.* London: Vintage.

WHITE, H. (1987). *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation.* Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

ZAMORA, L.P. (1989). *Writing the apocalypse: historical vision in contemporary U.S. and Latin American fiction.* Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.